

Canines Helping People: How Dogs Have Been Useful

In a Variety of Settings

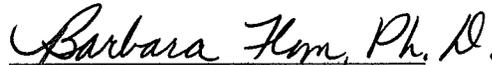
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ABSTRACT

Dogs have been helping humans in a variety of ways for thousands of years. Only recently have dogs been used to help facilitate emotional growth in people in therapy-type settings. Animal-assisted therapy began in the 1960's and has emerged as a technique that is useful within a variety of settings; hospitals, nursing homes, prisons and schools to name a few. From dogs in hospitals lowering stress among health care professionals to dogs in anger management groups helping participants feel more willing to share and positive about attending therapy, dogs are becoming more attractive as ways to help people in the area of human services.

This investigation reviews two main questions: 1) What are the benefits and risks to people who use dogs in therapy-type settings? and 2) Why are more schools not using canine therapy to their advantage? Some research has shown that having animals in therapy-type settings has benefited participants as well as the employees who work with the dogs. However, due to an overall lack of empirically sound studies with reliable results, further research is

needed to validate using canines in different capacities within our nation's schools. It is recommended that animal-assisted therapy should be further researched to determine the place of dogs in schools.

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I would like to acknowledge all of the dogs in my life that have helped me develop my passion for animals. I would like to continue spreading my passion for animals and be involved in canine therapy in my career as a school counselor. This especially goes out to Dylan, my first dog who taught me the value of unconditional love. This is also an acknowledgement of all the future dogs that will be a part of my life and may someday get to spread their unconditional love to others as certified canine therapy dogs.

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Chapter I: Introduction

An old saying by the Aboriginal people states, “dogs make us human” (Grandin & Johnson, 2005). At first glance, this seems like an odd saying, but according to current evolutionary theory, people did not domesticate dogs, rather humans and canines co-evolved (Schleidt & Shalter, 2003). Whether you believe in this current theory or not is irrelevant; the fact is that we’ve been working with dogs since the last ice age and our relationship with them has become one unlike any other. There is increasing evidence that the more we work with dogs, the more we learn about ourselves, and the more we can do to help people who are struggling with both psychological and physical problems. We have developed a human-animal bond that most scientific research fails to fully explain. We know that this bond is strong and benefits both the dog and the person in many ways.

Many theories have been applied to describe the human-animal bond. Some of these include psychoanalytic, attachment, and learning theories (Wicker, 2005). Most of the qualitative techniques used to examine the benefits of using animals in therapy have shown improvements in the areas of socio-emotional, cognitive, behavioral, communicative, and physical improvement (Wicker, 2005).

Dogs have become more than just companions; some hold titles as service animals. The term service animal covers a wide spectrum of human needs from search and rescue, drug detection, seeing eye dogs for the blind, assistance animals to wheelchair bound individuals and even seizure alert dogs. These types of animals have been allowed in various settings for many years, and their popularity is on the rise since they have been so effective in helping people in different capacities.

The counseling process can be enhanced by using animals or including animal-assisted therapy (AAT) in an individual or group therapy or counseling session. Netting, Wilson, & New (1987) showed that talking to dogs while the therapist listens can make talking to the therapist easier. Animals can help individuals with communication difficulties learn to communicate better with their counselors or therapists.

The first use of AAT was in 1962 by Boris Levinson, a child psychologist (Chandler, 2001). His paper was published in *Mental Hygiene* and was titled, *The dog as a co-therapist* (Chandler, 2001). He incorporated his own dog "Jingles" in his sessions and was able to make progress with children who were withdrawn and uncommunicative. Since that time, research has indicated that the mere presence of an animal lowers anxiety and helps people open up and participate more in therapy (Chandler, 2004). The advantages and disadvantages of using animals to facilitate the treatment of patients in some capacity were not investigated scientifically until 1970, when the American Humane Education Society commissioned a survey to address the use of animals in this capacity (Netting et al., 1987). The survey found that 48% of all institutions surveyed were using animals in one capacity or another (Netting et al., 1987).

Many studies have investigated the health benefits of dogs on people, both as companions and as service animals. (Lynch, n.d). Additional studies have demonstrated the efficacy of using dogs in different settings such as prisons, hospitals, and nursing homes, to help rehabilitate people in a variety of ways (Barker, Knisely, McCain, & Best, 2005). Dogs are also helpful in schools; some studies have linked the use of dogs have been used in the classroom and improvement in reading scores (Lynch, n.d.).

Some disadvantages need to be considered before any public setting, such as a school, implements any type of program that involves dogs. Dogs that are deemed assistance animals are supposed to be allowed in any public settings to assist their owners, but there are cases where school districts have fought this. The reasons vary, but some of the most common include students with allergies to dogs, and how the owner will control the dog at all times. Other concerns that need to be addressed include how people from other cultures will be affected if there is a dog in the vicinity, as well as general safety concerns like possible dog bites, and diseases and parasites that can transfer from dogs to people. Yet another concern is for the safety of the dogs in the program.

Statement of the Problem

Using dogs in a therapy role is a relatively new idea; therefore there are very few scientific studies published that speak to its efficacy. Due to this lack of research in the broad sense, there is a lack of documented evidence that using dogs specifically in a school setting would be beneficial to students. There are many concerns that need to be addressed before implementing a canine therapy program in schools.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this literature review is to analyze critically the past research regarding the use of canines in both therapy and general assistance capacities in a variety of settings. There are few studies that specifically look at dogs and schools, therefore generalizations will be made in order to understand how professionals working in schools, such as school counselors, could implement a canine therapy program to benefit students.

Research Questions

The following questions were the motivation behind this study:

1. What are the benefits and risks to people who use dogs in therapy-type settings?
2. Why are more schools not using canine therapy to their advantage?

Assumptions and Limitations

Several assumptions need to be addressed in this study. One assumption is that the results of the use of canine therapy in different settings, such as hospitals and prisons, may have implications for uses in schools. Another assumption is that the author needs to search broadly for information regarding canine therapy.

A limitation of this study is the fact that all research on canines used in therapy settings will not be analyzed. Even though there is a limited amount of research in this area, it will not be possible to analyze every study. A second limitation is the use of some research that is not peer-reviewed.

Definition of Terms

The following is a list of terms related to education and/or canine therapy that will help the reader better understand this topic.

Animal-assisted therapy (AAT): A therapeutic intervention strategy that implements an animal to achieve a desired physical, emotional, cognitive, or social goal with a client.

Canine Good Citizen test: A program created by the American Kennel Club (AKC) as a way to reward dogs that have good manners and obedience around people. Upon completion of the program, the dog receives a certificate of completion.

Individualized Education Program (IEP): The IEP refers to a plan unique to each individual student receiving special education or related services in the public schools (U.S. Department of Education, 2007).

Service Animal: According to The Americans with Disabilities Act, a service animal is “any guide dog, signal dog, or other animal individually trained to provide assistance to an individual with a disability” (Americans with Disabilities Act, 1996, p. 2).

Zoonosis: Any disease that can be transmitted from an animal to a human, or vice versa.

Chapter II: Literature Review

This literature review examines evidence for mental and physical health benefits of using dogs for therapy purposes. It reviews different settings such as hospitals, prisons and schools, in which animal-assisted interventions have been implemented and both positive and negative outcomes have been experienced. The current and past use of dogs in schools will also be addressed.

General Health Benefits

Numerous studies have shown a variety of mental and physical benefits for people who either own their own animals, or are a part of an animal therapy regimen. Loneliness is a major contributor to premature death, at least in America, and it is also a major contributor to heart disease, which is the leading cause of death in the United States (Lynch, n.d.). Studies done in the healthcare setting suggest patients experience decreased loneliness, fear, anxiety, and depression, as well as increased socialization Barker et al. (2005). Still other studies have shown decreased blood pressure simply by petting an animal (Lynch, n.d.). It has also been found that animals help people lower their anxiety and participate more in therapy (Chandler, 2004).

Children are also at risk for experiencing high anxiety; this has been found to be especially true when children need to read out loud (Lynch, n.d.). Introducing a dog to the classroom when the children were both reading out loud and reading quietly resulted in lower blood pressure while completing the activity, a sign of calmness (Lynch, n.d.).

Using dogs to improve the health of individuals who work in different settings, such as healthcare, has also been documented in the literature. A study by Barker et al. (2005) looked at the health benefits in healthcare professionals who were exposed to relaxation time

with a therapy dog. In this study, a group of participants had twenty minutes of quiet relaxation time alone, another group had five minutes of interaction with a therapy dog, and yet a third group had twenty minutes of relaxation time with a therapy dog (Barker et al., 2005). The results of this study indicated that there was a reduction in cortisol, a hormone linked to stress. Cortisol levels were reduced in all three conditions with no significant difference between the groups of people who had twenty minutes of quiet time versus both groups who interacted with the therapy dog (Barker et al., 2005). There was one additional significant finding of the study. Barker et al. (2005) concluded, "The 5-min. interaction with the dog is associated with cortisol reduction equivalent to a 20-min. intervention or 20-min. of quiet rest" (p. 727). This finding suggested that professionals in fast-paced careers, through the assistance of a therapy dog, can take shorter breaks from their work to relieve stress and therefore be more productive individuals (Barker et al., 2005).

Sometimes the benefits to people are not always known before a canine therapy or assistance program is started. In some instances, dogs go above and beyond what they were trained to do to further assist their people. An example of this is some dogs that have been trained as seizure response dogs. They were trained to assist their owners once a seizure had begun (Grandin & Johnson, 2005). Interestingly, some dogs have been able to predict seizures before they begin and alert their owners ahead of time (Grandin & Johnson, 2005). Dogs that can perform this type of service for individuals, especially in a school setting, are invaluable. Teachers and other staff working with these individuals would have advanced warning and could be better prepared to assist should a seizure occur during school hours.

Animal-assisted Therapy Benefits

The counseling process can benefit from the use of animal-assisted therapy. Animals can assist in the trust building process between counselor and client (Chandler, 2004).

Animals can break down communication barriers between people. Many people find it hard to talk to other people; some find it easier to talk to animals. One popular technique used during AAT is to have the client talk to the animal while the therapist or counselor is present (Chandler, 2004). Animals also can also be identified as a friend by the client, which promotes a safe atmosphere for sharing as well as the feeling of unconditional acceptance by the animal, which can help transfer to how the client feels about the counselor.

Therapeutic goals can be completed or enhanced by through the use of animals in the counseling process (Chandler, 2004). Some of these goals include: improve socialization and communication, reduce isolation, loneliness, improve affect, lessen depression, improve memory, address grieving and loss, improve self-esteem, improve cooperation, reduce anxiety, improve ability to trust, and learn how to touch appropriately (Chandler, 2004). AAT can improve mental health treatment interventions as well. Some of these include: practicing teaching the animal something new, engage in play or other appropriate interactions, learn how to take care of the animal, learn how to talk to others by talking about the animal, discuss how the animal might be feeling, following instructions, interpret the animal's behavior, and generalize the animal's behavior to human situations (Chandler, 2004).

Other benefits happen when animal-assisted therapy is used in the classroom. Some goals for using AAT in the classroom setting include: helping kids gain knowledge about animals, learning humane care of animals, motor skill development, practicing discipline,

learning empathy and compassion, and practicing responsibility (Chandler, 2004). Many important lifelong lessons can be used, either in therapy or in the classroom setting that can help improve the student both in school and beyond.

Efficacy of Canine Therapy in Different Settings

Canines have been used successfully in a number of settings. One setting in which programs utilizing canines have been effective is in our nation's prisons and juvenile detention centers. One specific program, the Indiana Canine Assistant and Adolescent Network, or ICAAN, had inmates at a juvenile detention center train dogs to become assistants for children with a variety of disabilities (Turner, 2007). Not only does this program benefit the inmates, but it benefits the children who receive fully trained therapy dogs (Turner, 2007).

The goal of Turner's study was to gain more factual knowledge regarding the outcomes of one such program (Turner, 2007). She used in-depth unstructured interviews as her methodology, since her study had only six inmate juvenile participants (Turner, 2007). The three basic questions she asked the participants were: what is the experience like for you (the offender), what benefits do you believe you have gotten out of the program, and how can the experience affect you (Turner, 2007). She found several major themes through her interviews, including increases in perceived patience, parenting skills, helping others, self-esteem, and socializing skills (Turner, 2007).

Animal-assisted therapy can also facilitate group counseling for adolescents. A study by Lange, Cox, Bernert and Jenkins (2006) looked at how a dog would impact an anger management group comprised of three males and two females ranging in age from 13 to 16.

Tucker, a four year old Golden Retriever, was selected for the group and had been assessed by two Therapy Dogs International evaluators and had passed his Canine Good Citizen test.

The first author of this study, Lange, was the one who facilitated the anger management group (Lange et al., 2006). Lange noted that as the weeks progressed, the participants paid greater attention to the dog. Members began to relate their human anger to dog anger and were able to identify when both human and animal were angry. Tucker was also a comforting presence; Lange noted that when one member did not like what another member was saying, that member would call the dog over and speak softly to the dog. At the end of the counseling experience, only three of the five participants were interviewed as the other two were not available. Analyzing the transcripts of the interviews revealed that the participants noted Tucker's calming effect as the most consistent benefit of having him attend the group sessions; this was noted by all three participants. The participants also stated that they felt safer to reveal more of themselves with Tucker in the room. Interestingly, Tucker was perceived to be empathetic and sensitive to the participant's emotions. Tucker also helped the participants to be more motivated to attend and participate in the sessions and increase their overall interest in counseling. It was suggested by the author that having a dog like Tucker may help clients enjoy counseling more.

Jalongo, Astorino, and Bomboy (2004) outlined schools and health care facilities as places where AAT therapy is becoming more prevalent. The article also discussed the efficacy of such programs. One such example was of a child who refused to do exercises to strengthen her hand, but when the activity was changed to brushing a dog, the child became a willing participant (Jalongo, et al., 2004).

Dogs in Schools

Many children experience stress both at home and at school and may find it hard to open up and talk about themselves and their lives. Using dogs can be one way to help kids relax and talk about their feelings. According to Serpell (as cited in Jalongo et al., 2004),

Animal-assisted therapy is founded on two principles: Children's natural tendency to open up in the presence of animals and the stress-moderating effect of an animal's calm presence. Research estimated that over 70% of children of all ages do tend to talk and confide in animals (p. 10).

Dogs can be a useful tool for the schools to use to help their children. Schools are always looking for new techniques and ideas to help improve student learning and overall success.

Limited published research has shown the efficacy of using dogs in schools. One such study, however, by Wicker (2005), looked at using dogs with teenagers in an alternative middle/high school. This study looked at the effects of using dogs with a sample of at-risk teenagers between twelve and seventeen years of age (Wicker, 2005). Effects were measured in the areas of social skills, interpersonal relations, attitude toward school, interpersonal relationships, direction following, aggressive behavior, classroom absences, and respectful and caring responses toward others. Students were selected based on voluntary enrollment, and thirty-one students completed the program. The study was set up into three groups, with one group of students receiving individual therapy dog time, the second group having small group interactions with a therapy dog, and a third control group who did not receive any contact with therapy dogs. The Behavior Assessment System for Children (BASC), which is a standardized instrument, was used to determine the effectiveness of the sessions on the student's socialization and social/peer behavior. Another component of the student's

assessment came in the form of a semi-structured interview of the participating student's overall experience in the program.

The results of Wicker's study showed the impact on five variables under investigation, including aggressive behavior, interpersonal relations, attitude toward school, social skills and absences between treatment groups (Wicker, 2005). These variables did not yield statistically significant results. Wicker also found that there was not a statistically significant difference between those in the individual, small group and control conditions (Wicker, 2005). Wicker did find significant positive results in teacher's social skills ratings of students, as stated in the post-treatment interviews, if the student was either in the individual or small group treatment that had contact with the therapy dogs. Another interesting finding was that non-compliant direction following increased for students in either therapy dog treatment; non-compliant direction following was expected to decrease in these treatment groups.

While this study did not yield statistically significant results except in positive social skill interaction with adults and other students, more research is needed to validate the use of canines with this population (Wicker, 2005). However, perceptions of student and staff of the program after its completion were very positive (Wicker, 2005).

Some research has been conducted on the use of dogs in the classroom setting. Kotrschal and Ortbauer (2003) did a study to test the positive influence of dogs on the social behavior of students at an elementary school in Austria. The children's behavior was videotaped for two hours weekly, first in the absence of dogs, and then with the presence of a dog (Kotrschal & Ortbauer, 2003). Even though there were individual differences in which children were more or less interested in the dog, it was found that aggressiveness and

hyperactivity decreased (Kotrschal & Ortbauer, 2003). In addition, some kids who were withdrawn or quieter than others interacted more socially than they had during the control; it was also noted that this was more true with the boys than the girls (Kotrschal & Ortbauer, 2003).

A similar study conducted by Hergovich, Monshi, Semmler, & Zieglmayer (2002) looked at the presence of a dog in a classroom related to the children's social intelligence, independence, empathy with animals and social-emotional atmosphere. The participants in that study were forty-six first grade students in Austria in either the experimental or control group. Those in the experimental group had a dog present in their classroom for three months. Results indicated that those in the experimental group with the dog present displayed more independent behavior and empathy. The teachers in this study also indicated they felt the children in the dog group were more sociable and had fewer aggressive behaviors. These results suggest the mere presence of a dog can foster social and cognitive development in children (Hergovich et al., 2002).

Another study of the effects of dogs in the classroom was conducted to find out how well third graders in Austria could learn about social behavior, empathy, and aggression (Tissen, Hergovich, & Spiel, 2007). Three experimental conditions were set up: social training with dogs, social training without dogs, and dog attendance without social training. Participants were 230 third graders in three different elementary schools; the program was ten weeks in length. The sessions were once per week for about ninety minutes. Questionnaires were used to analyze the results; they were given before the each training session and then once again three weeks after the completion of the program. Teacher surveys indicated that there was a significant improvement in social behavior in all three

conditions. The students also showed an increase in empathy, regardless of program.

However, when it came to aggression, only the group that had the social training with the dog was found to have any statistically significant improvements (Tissen, Hergovich, & Spiel, 2007).

Animals can be used to help enhance character education programs as well. A study by Sprinkle (2008) evaluated a school based violence prevention/intervention and character education program with elementary and middle school students. This study focused on the Healing Species violence prevention program which utilized a pre-test/post-test format to determine student growth (Sprinkle, 2008). The dogs were used as teachers for some of the lessons and were just in the room for others. The weekly lessons focused on grieving, empathy, sharing and responsibility. Children practiced their new skills through interactive projects and service learning activities. Dependent variables examined in the study were empathy, violent behaviors, aggressive behaviors, and normative beliefs about aggression. Independent variables were socioeconomic status, gender, grade level and ethnicity. There were 310 students who participated in the pre-test and 296 that participated in the post-test; these students were from the fourth, fifth and sixth grades.

The results of this study showed that the Healing Species curriculum positively affected the students' beliefs about aggression, documented violent behaviors and levels of empathy (Sprinkle, 2008). Fewer out of school suspensions were one measure of the success of Healing Species. Beliefs about aggression and levels of empathy were measured only by the post-test. This study is a good example of how having a dog in the classroom can help enhance learning.

One population with whom the use of AAT is becoming more prevalent is with students who have pervasive developmental delay (PDD) or those who fall on the autism spectrum of disorders. Some students with these disorders can be anxious or fearful around animals, but when they are exposed to the same animals on a regular basis the anxiety and fears go away and the students become comfortable and confident (Law & Scott, 1995). Through using AAT with these students, Law & Scott (1995) found that student confidence and self-esteem increased, a sense of responsibility was instilled and independence and socialization increased. These gains are important for this group because many struggle with language development. Through the specific type of AAT used with this group, students had the opportunity to take the animals home over the weekends. This made it possible for parents to reinforce skills and concepts learned in the classroom. Overall, students were able to use animals to learn and practice the skills need for future independent living.

Service animals in public schools can cause controversy, both among school administrators and the parents of students who use service dogs. One such case was that of Sarah Gavin and her five year old golden retriever mix, Satin (Samuels, 2006). Sarah had Down's syndrome and struggled mostly with her speech. Having Satin at her side helped keep her calm, slow her speech and speak more clearly (Samuels, 2006). Satin was allowed in every other public building because of her assistance dog title, minus the middle school where Sarah was in the eighth grade (Samuels, 2006). The administration argued they would not allow Satin to accompany Sarah because Satin was not written in Sarah's IEP (Samuels, 2006).

Disadvantages of Canine Therapy in Schools

In addition to providing specific examples of programs where animal therapy is used and is successful, Jalongo et al., (2004) looked at some concerns that need to be addressed when starting or running an animal therapy program. One major concern is that animals may transmit one or more diseases, such as rabies or psittacosis, to clients. Other concerns included addressing those who may have a fear of dogs, allergies, and being aware of cultural differences when it comes to animals. For example, some cultures consider dogs dirty and more of a nuisance than a pet or friend (Jalongo et al., 2004). There are also individuals who have phobias of dogs or just do not like them. Even though there are concerns to be dealt with, there is overwhelming evidence that animals can be beneficial to people in a variety of settings (Jalongo et al., 2004).

Dog bites and allergy rates are numbers that need to be considered. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimated that nearly 4.7 million people are bitten by dogs every year (Centers for Disease Control, 2007). The CDC also reported that “the rate of dog bite-related injuries is highest for children ages 5 to 9 years, and the rate decreases as the child ages.” (Centers for Disease Control, 2007). When it comes to allergies, the National Association of State and Public Health Veterinarians (NASPHV) estimated that roughly 15% of the American population experiences allergies to dogs and cats (National Association of State Public Health Veterinarians, 2004).

Yet other disadvantages may come in the form of money. It costs more money to train a dog to become a therapy dog than it would for just your average pet dog. Most people who are involved in the field work with their own animals and put up all the costs involved. However, if a school was looking at a long-term implementation of some type of canine

therapy program, the person or persons coordinating the program may seek compensation for their time and efforts. This could be minimized if the person or persons doing the program were already school staff members. Other costs may include having to hire additional staff to run the program.

A further obstacle in implementing a canine therapy program is that since it is not yet mandated by either the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 1975 or the No Child Left Behind Act of 2004, there is no real motivation for school administration to implement it. Many schools face budget crises and therefore can only afford those programs which are proven through empirical research to be most beneficial to students.

A final consideration is the welfare of the animals involved. A study by Porter (2005), was conducted to find out if therapy dogs were impacted negatively by the experience. The study utilized the Canine Companion Animal Stress Survey (CCASS) questionnaire mailed to members of the Delta Society Pet Partners (Porter, 2005). This organization has many affiliates across the nation and is primarily dedicated to providing therapy and assistance dogs to a variety of settings (Porter, 2005). The CCASS was comprised of a 6-point Likert-type scale asking the handlers to rate their dogs before a therapy visit, during the visit, and directly after the visit (Porter, 2005).

The study looked at visible signs of stress in dogs such as increased panting, increased resting, increased vocalization, and increased bowel movement (Porter, 2005). Results indicated that the majority of the dogs in the study experienced some level of stress, indicated by their increased need to rest after the therapy session, more so than some of the other visible signs of stress indicators (Porter, 2005). As with any new type of therapy, it's essential that all the potential risks are addressed before a new program is implemented.

Making sure that the dogs used in settings that can be stressful, like schools, is essential in implementing a good program where both the humans and the dogs can benefit with minimal risks to either species.

There are many reasons to use animals in therapy or classroom type settings. Animals provide people with certain health benefits, such as reduced blood pressure and anxiety. Animals can also open the door for counseling; they can enhance trust and communication with the therapist or counselor. There are also disadvantages to consider when implementing a program that involves animals. The welfare of both human and animal must be considered. Animal-assisted therapy is one technique to consider for use in schools both in the classroom and in counseling sessions.

Chapter III: Summary, Critical Analysis, and Recommendations

This critical analysis examines the literature presented in the previous chapters. This chapter also analyses the benefits and issues that determine the implementation of canine therapy for use in a school setting. Lastly, this chapter will provide recommendations for further research in the area of canine therapy and also recommendations to educators and school counselors on programs that would be useful in a school environment.

Summary

Canines have been used to help people in a variety of settings over the past few decades. Animal-assisted therapy first appeared in the early 1960's and has continued to gain momentum as an effective way to reach individuals in different settings (Chandler, 2001). Studies show us that those of us who own pets live longer, happier, and healthier lives (Lynch, n.d.). We also know that simply petting an animal can lower one's blood pressure (Lynch, n.d.). Still other studies have looked at how time with a therapy dog can even help the professionals in the setting relax, helping not only the targeted population, but the employees as well (Barker et al., 2005). Studies specific to schools indicate that dogs can help enhance character education programs, especially ones aimed at increasing empathy and decreasing aggressive behaviors (Sprinkle, 2008).

Specific settings have dogs integrated into rehabilitation programs. Hospitals, nursing homes, and prisons are all places where it is now almost common to see programs where dogs are being used to help sick people feel better, elderly feel more at home, and offenders turn away from their old ways and work toward making better choices (Turner, 2007). Other settings have been less successful in documenting the outcomes of the

programs that integrate dogs. Since research on using dogs in rehabilitation type programs is in its infancy, it's hard to make the same statements about what dogs can do for our schools.

Jalongo et al. (2004) discussed some of the serious disadvantages that go along with canine therapy in the schools. Considerations must be taken for those individuals who are allergic to dogs and precautions must be taken to ensure diseases are not transferred from dogs to humans. Educators must also be conscious of cultural differences and realize that other cultures do not view dogs in the positive light that our American culture does. In addition, there are many people who have phobias of dogs or do not like them in general. Still other considerations deal with the time and money needed to implement and run canine therapy in schools, especially with nationwide budget cuts and staff shortages. The fact that those programs mandated by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) or No Child Left Behind (NCLB) may have preference in the school during budget crunches is another issue. A further disadvantage is that there just is not strong empirical evidence to warrant using canine therapy in schools at this point in time.

Critical Analysis

Due in part to supportive research, individuals have found ways to incorporate dogs into other areas of their lives, such as at work, schools, hospitals, and prisons. Scientific studies in hospitals, nursing homes, and prisons have shown increases in positive outcomes for the people there.

The study by Barker et al. (2005) that demonstrated that a dog could have stress-reducing effects on healthcare professionals reported results that would appear to have implications for those working in professions of high stress. However, because the setting was a controlled environment, the stress values were in the low range. The author suggests

that further studies are conducted in a more natural setting where inherent stressors are present. This may be a challenge, especially in the healthcare profession as dogs probably will never be allowed in the operating room. Another problem with this study is the lack of a control group; without this component, it is hard to determine if the dog was the sole reason for the stress reduction.

Turner's interviews with inmates who helped train dogs for children with disabilities indicated that the offenders gained some positives from the program; however, she only interviewed six participants (Turner, 2007). While this research has positive implications toward the efficacy of using dogs to help rehabilitate people, her sample size is limited and therefore it is hard to generalize her findings to the larger population of offenders in America. There are also many types of programs that prisons and detention centers use that incorporate dogs, so it is difficult to generalize Turner's findings since they were limited to one particular program.

The study on using a dog in an anger management group counseling program with adolescents by Lange et al. (2006) also produced evidence that a dog could help facilitate counseling objectives. However, the sample size in this study is also very small which makes it difficult to generalize the findings to the entire population of adolescents who attend anger management groups as well as other people in general who seek out group counseling for various other reasons.

The study by Wicker that included a dog used in therapy sessions at an alternative middle/high school was very sound in its methodology and delivery. However, results were not significant. The study was not a total loss; both teachers and students rated the program very highly after its completion. Studies that look to find benefits for including dogs in

schools but end up with results that are not significant fail to impress those individuals who are looking to implement programs in their schools. It is hard to justify starting a program that uses dogs only because the teachers and the students “like it.”

The studies that looked at how children’s behavior was different in the classroom with and without a dog present produced positive results (Kortschal and Orbauer, 2003, Hergovich et al., 2002, and Tissen et al., 2007). However, these studies were limited to small classes and were all studies done in Austria, not the United States. Not only is the sample size small, but Austria may have different methods of instruction and expectations of their students, therefore it is hard to generalize their findings to what would be expected of children in the United States. Furthermore, definitions in Austria for the variables they were examining, such as aggressive behaviors, may be different than those used in the United States.

Having a dog present during character education lessons, as in the study by Sprinkle (2008) may help increase learning and empathy among elementary and middle school children. However, there was no control group used in this study, so it is hard to make the determination that the dog did truly make the material more salient. It is also hard to determine if the curriculum was strong enough that the children would have learned the material without the dog present. These questions could be better answered if a control group where the Healing Species was taught without a dog present was compared to the group who received the curriculum with the dog.

Problems with the methodology in the previously described studies may be a major reason why canine therapy has not been shown to be as effective as it could possibly be. Research that addresses the issues like using a control group and determining the differences

between the control and experimental group would provide better information on the effects of using dogs as therapy agents. The human-animal bond is something that has been passed on in anecdotal stories for centuries. Hopefully scientific research will one day find a way to describe how this bond specifically can benefit both people and animals, and further examine the efficacy of using dogs to help people live better lives. In almost every study analyzed, the participants described their interactions with dogs as positive and beneficial, even though this was hard to document empirically.

Recommendations

Further research is needed to validate using canines in different capacities within our nation's schools. The study by Wicker (2005) looked like it would yield significant results, but only one variable, social skills, was positively affected. Studies that involve more students may yield better results. The study by Wicker (2005) also indicated that teachers and students enjoyed the program and indicated in their exit interviews that they felt they had gained in different areas by completing the program. The measures used by Wicker may not have been sensitive or appropriate enough to quantify the exact benefits gained by the students. The development of an assessment tool specifically for use with animal therapy may be able to help us pinpoint exactly what is happening.

Longitudinal studies are non-existent when it comes to canine therapy. There is very little information about the effects of canine therapy down the road for those individuals lucky enough to have been involved with it. Longitudinal research on those canine programs that exist in the schools could tell us more about how these children are doing when they reach high schools, if there are higher graduation rates, and if there are higher rates of college attendance and graduation. This information would be essential in helping school districts

decide if canine therapy programs are going to produce positive results that administrators, parents, and community members can endorse.

More research is needed on the programs that are using canines but not collecting any data on how the dogs are impacting the participants. More data on what is currently being done will add to the knowledge base about what these types of programs can specifically do to benefit the target population. More scientific evidence will be helpful in allowing schools determine if using dogs in their schools will be beneficial.

Recommendations for Educators

Educators who are interested in implementing a canine therapy program should make sure they review previous literature and keep up to date on the latest research findings. There are more and more studies being conducted as educators and counselors are using dogs in their counseling offices and schools. Educators who do decide to implement this type of program should also consider keeping data on the outcomes of the program. There is limited research on canine therapy so the more empirically sound research is available, the easier it will be for educators to decide if canine therapy will be useful in the schools. From all accounts, those who work with dogs seem to enjoy it and have the perception that the dogs have helped them in various ways. Dogs have been helping people for centuries and canine therapy is another way in which humans can benefit from our canine companions.

Those individuals who are looking to work with dogs in their various settings should also be knowledgeable on the current training techniques used with dogs that are used in a therapy-type capacity. Possible dogs should be tested to make sure they have a suitable temperament and trainability. The Delta Society is one organization that offers a list of trainers that can work with dogs to make them certified therapy dogs. The Americans with

Disabilities Act does not require that dogs be certified, but it is preferred (The Delta Society, 2008). Dogs should have also passed their Canine Good Citizen test to prove they are suitable around people and can obey the basic commands of their handler.

Other considerations such as size and breed must also be considered; there are over 400 breeds of dogs and some are more suitable for work with people than others. Some dogs also have bad reputations, such as pit bulls, even though they can be great at therapy. The size of the dog should also be considered; children especially may feel intimidated by a large dog. Finding a certified, or non-certified therapy dog, or training one's own dog for therapy work can be expensive and time consuming, so this must be considered as well.

Dogs have been used to help people for thousands of years. Some dogs have been bred to round up sheep, others to pull carts and yet others bred solely to provide companionship to people. Canine therapy has only been around for the past 50 or so years and although there is some research that has been done on its efficacy, more research is needed. Individuals who are interested in implementing a canine therapy program, especially in the schools, need to consider what the research has found when dogs are in the classroom and in therapy-type settings. By all accounts, professionals, clients and children enjoy having the dogs around, but the research has not been conclusive in finding that dogs always have a significant impact on people's lives therapeutically. Individuals considering implementation of canine therapy must also consider the concerns that people, especially school administration and parents may have with having dogs in school. Dogs can be a health concern for some and unfortunately, not everyone likes dogs or understands how much they can benefit people.

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